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The World's Need of Christ.

BY REV. M. L. CARLISLE, D.D., CHARLESTON, S. C.

(Address delivered at the South Atlantic Missionary Conference, Asheville.)

My subject is a large one. It deals with great things: with a world vast and vague, with a need past all computation, with a Christ who is infinite. Even when we can reduce a proposition to exact terms and definitions, it is sometimes hard to grasp. What shall we do when no term of our proposition can be exactly defined?

What do we mean by "the world?" We use "the world" in various meanings. Certainly in all of them "the world" needs Christ. What is the measure of that need? Who can sum it up for us? To do that would require the exact measurement of the experiences and possibilities of the soul, its conscious and subconscious states, the depths of its despair, and the sweep of its aspirations under the touch of the Divine Spirit. And when we add to the personal need the need of humanity in all ages and places, and varying conditions of personality and circumstance, it is evident that the world's need is beyond our measuring.

And the Christ *is* infinite. We believe that without at all knowing what it means. Experience tells us that he is sufficient for all our individual need. History bears witness to his ability to meet all the world's past need. And so we believe that in him are all the "riches of grace," the power, wisdom, and mercy needed for the salvation of this world and all worlds.

It would seem, therefore, that there is need of limitation upon us to-day, and, as our meeting has specially to do with things missionary, the line of limitation lies along the great divide between the needs of the Christian and the non-Christian world. Yet, in the last analysis of them, these needs are the same. Both need the Christ to uplift and save. Our vision is imperfect. We are prone to see but one side; and often, because the multitude at home is nearer to us, we are disposed to think that its need is the greater. All men need Christ. He alone can meet the aspirations of the soul and go down into its depths. The gospel is to be preached to all, because it is sufficient for all.

It is estimated that there are some 1,500,000,000 people in the world. Of these, perhaps 400,000,000—less than one-third—are classed as Christians. Even of these a large proportion are only nominal Christians. They live in Christian countries, they enjoy

a Christian civilization; but the power of Christ in the heart is not known. The other 1,100,000,000 souls are not even in contact with Christian influences—in China, 300,000,000; in India, 250,000,000; in Africa, more than 100,000,000. Every one of them has the same need of Christ that you have.

Add to these millions in darkest heathenism, oppressed by its cruelty, debased by its crime, degraded by its superstition, without God and without hope, the millions in countries where Romanism prevails, and the millions under the Greek Church, bigoted, ignorant, superstitious, putting the creature above the Creator, worshiping Mary instead of Christ, ruled by a priestly despotism as cruel and cold and calculating as ever any heathen hierarchy was, and what an array we have! Now to these add the 8,000,000 Jews, intensely religious but feeding on formal tradition, and the millions of the Moslem world, and we begin to see, through the vagueness of vast numbers, what need the world has of Christ, and what a claim this blind and needy multitude has on us to whom the gospel has given light and joy. Every one of these millions—Jews, Mohammedans, heathen, idolatrous, and superstitious Christians—needs Christ as much as you and I do. For them he died, as for us.

The hearts of men are full of great questions. Religions and philosophies innumerable have pretended to answer these questions, but, aside from Christ's gospel, the world is still "an infant crying for the light." Jesus alone can answer the cry of humanity. He has answered it. Four great interrogations stand out in every age and everywhere. The world wants to know about God, about duty, about sin, about death. These questions condense the religious history of the world. We ask them. Our neighbors make the same inquiries: "What is back of that impenetrable mystery?" "What means this conscience of guilt, this sense of duty?" "Shall I, who am thrilled with deathless aspiration, fall as the leaves of autumn?" And wherever we go, in cities or hamlets, in forest or desert, in the frozen regions of the north, in sunny isles sleeping beneath the tropic sun, we find these same longings, for these questions are universal.

Jesus answers all these questions. He sends us into the world with the answer. That answer is in the realization that God is "our Father." All the universe is his house; all men are his children; he lifts up the fallen, and carries us and our burdens too. Ancient Job cried out: "O that I knew where I might find him!" Modern philosophy questions: "Is there a God?" To these, and to the inarticulate cry of bleeding and blinded souls, groping in darkness and mire, yet hungry and thirsty for God,

comes that word "our Father." That is what the world needs—a God of love. You and I know we are not merely driftwood or wrecks on an infinite ocean, not mere worms of dust and darkness, not hopeless criminals to be destroyed, but children of that Father who makes his sun to shine on the evil and on the good.

So with the question of duty. Men feel that they must do right. The question is: "What is right?" Standards vary. The Spartan stole; the Hindu burned wives; a professedly Christian state sanctions divorce for almost every cause; philosophers have written volumes; priests have arranged rituals and penances. Still the world gropes for the key of duty. Jesus puts it into our hands in two sentences: "Love God," "Love your neighbor." I see class against class; capital against labor; trusts, monopolies, evils; conditions insufferable due to greed and sin. The world needs to be set right in the way of duty and peace; and, somehow, I believe all would be right if we would but follow Jesus and "love God" and "love our neighbors also."

So the world wants to know about the forgiveness of sins. This question is world-wide and world-old. Conscience is not exclusively a Christian faculty, nor is the guilt of sin an experience belonging only to Christians and Christian lands. There is something in every heart that recognizes it. Remorse follows wrongdoing. Again and again do men confess sin. Some one has said that "the Medusa head in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, with its coiling serpent hair and its face like that of an insane angel, is an appropriate symbol of sin unforgotten and unforgiven." Those bloody shirts, those beds of spikes, that babe given to the sacred crocodile—all are but the world's way of atoning for sin. We know how futile it all is. These things do not remove guilt nor bring peace to the soul. The world needs to learn that God *is* reconciled. He himself is the strongest power to save. The grace of Jesus is the most precious asset of the world. This is the answer we are to bear to the sin-darkened world. Thank God for it!

There remains, then, the fear of death. How it oppresses the world! Even in the clear light of the gospel it is sufficiently sad. What of those who have no hope—those burdened and bereaved ones in heathen darkness? Their heaven is vague and unsatisfying. Their hope is extinction. Their hearts quiver and bleed like ours, but there is no balm of faith in "Jesus and the resurrection." To them there is no loving, righteous God, no atoning, pleading Saviour, no Holy Ghost to enable them to win

the victory over sin and death. How the world needs the Christ to bring it inspiration and hope!

Shall we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation! O salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest nation
Has learned Messiah's name.

A careful study of the other religions of the world shows them utterly helpless to save. Even the remnant of Judaism has no spiritual impulse. It has become a dead, formal, ethical fatalism. One and all, the non-Christian religions fail to satisfy the inquiries of the soul and result in moral deterioration, intellectual apathy, and material blight. The more we learn of soul possibilities, the more awful is our realization of the failure of these religions to revive and restore the soul. Look at China, with its millions in the grip of Confucianism and Buddhism, a people intellectual and patient, beginning to wake to civilized ideals; see Japan, alert and active, getting out of bed in a way to astonish the world, casting off the old faiths along with antiquated customs, and beginning to reach for the instruments of power; see India, steeped in caste, with cruel and sensual idols in every temple, terrified by the spooks and phantoms of its philosophies, rocking herself to sleep in the cradle of Nirvana; see Islam, with its creed and war cry of sublime truth and basest falsehood, "God is one! and Mohammed is his prophet!" dead and dry as dust, mummified and petrified into stoical fatalism by "the will of Allah," and with no better hope for the future than a Sybarite's paradise; see the great Dark Continent, dark with more than the blackness of skin of its teeming inhabitants, dark with cruelty, superstition, and sensuality indescribable; see those other multitudes the world over, to whom religion does not mean peace and love and hope and comfort and inspiration, but ignorance and superstition and bigotry and shame! Yes, surely the world needs Christ to enlighten its ignorance, comfort its sorrows, direct its energies, and "bring life and immortality to light." Let us open our hearts and heed the divine command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

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